

VZCZCXYZ0000  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #1442/01 1082207  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 172207Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2430  
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0271  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 6114  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 1522  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6765

UNCLAS BOGOTA 001442

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S APRIL 2 VISIT TO CARTAGENA

#### Summary

¶1. The Ambassador visited Cartagena, capital of the Department of Bolivar, to attend a bilateral summit between the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and the Colombian Navy (COLNAV), meet with the Mayor of Cartagena and the Governor of the Department of Bolivar, and visit a Little league baseball team and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) assistance center in poor neighborhoods. The bilateral summit addressed the importance of USCG and COLNAV collaboration. The Governor and the Mayor underscored the importance of cooperation between Embassy Bogota and the leadership of the region in promoting tourism and regional economic development, strengthening regional security, and solving the problems of the displaced population in the area. Both advocated the opening of the U.S/. Embassy branch office in Cartagena. Local press coverage was heavy and positive. End summary.

#### USCG and COLNAV Combat Trafficking on the Open Seas

¶2. Representatives from the USCG, headed by USCG Commandant Admiral Thad W. Allen, Mexico, Panama, and COLNAV's Commandant Admiral Barrera, Admiral Cely, and their staffs attended the summit. Expected representatives from Ecuador did not attend because of the recent border tensions between the GOC and GOE. The summit focused on solving working-level problems to continuously improve joint, combined counter-drug operations and improved communication. The summit examined current trafficking trends that demand cooperation and use of new technology such as biometrics for the identification of suspects at sea.

#### A U.S. Embassy Presence in Cartagena Would Help Colombia

¶3. At a meeting hosted by the Mayor Judith Pinedo in her office, mayor Pinedo acknowledged the prospective positive impact of the U.S. - Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement on Cartagena. She stated that the city had tremendous potential as a commercial port, tourist destination and a business center, but needed improved infrastructure and security in order to increase number of visitors and attract more international business. The Mayor stated that an expanded U.S. presence in Cartagena would be crucial to promoting the city, as it would demonstrate growing U.S. confidence in Colombia that would lead to an improvement in Colombia's international image. The Ambassador agreed that there are valid reasons for considering the establishment of a U.S. Embassy branch office in Cartagena including the city's positive changes in recent years, the presence of over 1000 American citizens in the city, hundreds of

thousands of U.S. tourists, and the importance of the Cartagena port for the whole Andean region.

¶4. The Ambassador suggested that discussions about the opening of an Embassy branch office could take place between the GOC and the U.S. Embassy, but stated that if there were such a decision it should be carefully timed to provide maximum benefit to U.S. - Colombian relations and to maximize the promotion of Cartagena And the entire Caribbean region of Colombia.

¶5. The Governor of Bolivar, Joaco Berrio, thanked the Ambassador for the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) assistance through the high-profile Alternative Development and Municipal Strengthening program (ADAM). USAID's efforts assisted in the creation of small business and generated economic opportunities for over 4,000 families. Governor Berrio asked for a continuation of this program.

#### Showing America's Friendly Face

¶6. The Ambassador and USCG Commandant visited an underprivileged neighborhood of Cartagena and met with members of the Bravitos baseball club, ages 6-14, at a baseball field that the USCG and COLNAV had rejuvenated several months earlier with USAID assistance. After throwing out a ceremonial pitch clocked at 94 miles per hour and just nicking the outside corner, the Ambassador joined Admiral Allen in distributing sports equipment generously donated by Major League Baseball. The Ambassador talked to the children, demonstrated proper batting techniques, and emphasized the importance of sports education in promoting teamwork, respect, And other important skills that will help the youth of Colombia to succeed in all aspects of their lives and allow their community to prosper. Cartagena's major newspaper, El Universal, gave extensive and positive coverage to the Ambassador's visit with the Bravitos, publishing a large color photo of the Ambassador's change-up pitch on its front page. All major Colombian print and broadcast media reported on the visit, including a front page above-the-fold picture of COLNAV Commander Admiral Barrera throwing a pitch (AMB note: which hit a cameraman in the head), in El Tiempo, the major national daily.

¶7. The Ambassador closed his trip by touring Action for Bolivar (ACTUAR), one of the most prominent NGOs working in and around Cartagena. Since 2001, USAID has provided nearly one million dollars to ACTUAR to assist IDPs and other vulnerable populations in the areas of health, education, training, and income generation. During a round-table discussion with ACTUAR's founders and board members, the Ambassador underlined the USG commitment to helping Colombia's IDPs, and expressed his appreciation for ACTUAR's work in improving the lives of local families and their community.

BROWNFIELD